

## HB 135 Testimony

For the record.....

My name is Joan Anderson and I'm here to support HB 135 on behalf of State Superintendent Linda McCulloch. The Superintendent requested this bill to address several issues related to the state's payment for school bus routes. I'd like to explain the bill and answer any questions you have.

HB 135 basically does 3 things. It allows state and county transportation reimbursements for 2 types of school bus routes that are not currently eligible for reimbursement, and it increases the reimbursement rates for all school bus routes.

To understand the proposal, you'll need some **background information**. Currently, the law requires that school districts having a pupil transportation program must provide transportation to and from school for all students who live at least 3 miles from school. "Transportation" is defined to include bussing and reimbursing parents for transporting kids in private cars to the school or bus stop. Within 3 miles of the school, trustees may choose to bus students, but it's optional and the state and county don't provide funding for those routes. This creates the "3 mile limit" that's being referred to here.

The law sets a reimbursement rate per school bus mile, which ranges from \$0.95 to \$1.80 per mile, depending on the size of bus. The state and county each pay half of that mileage reimbursement to the school district. The district uses the reimbursement to fund a portion of the cost of their bussing program, including bus maintenance, drivers' salaries and benefits, fuel, etc. Districts use a permissive district tax levy to make up the difference.

I passed out a **picture** that shows current practice and impacts of HB 135 on reimbursable bus routes. On the left, you see a school building in the center of a 3 mile radius. The gray buildings are schools, and the white buildings are homes. The 2 routes shown in bolder dashed lines are types of routes that are currently eligible for reimbursement. The longer route shows a typical bus route that transports students who live more than 3 miles from the school to and from school. The route can pick up any students attending the school, including those inside the 3 mile limit. All bus miles on the route are reimbursed. The shorter bold dashed line shows another typical route, which dips outside the 3 mile limit to carry at least one rider who lives more than 3 miles from school. This type of route is also currently reimbursed.

The fainter lines show routes that schools are not currently eligible to receive reimbursement for, but these would become reimbursable under HB 135. The route on the left travels solely within 3 miles of the school and picks up only riders who live within 3 miles of the school. The cost of these routes is currently covered by charging parents and by a permissive district tax levy. It's possible that some parents may be unable to afford to pay for their students to ride.

The 2 routes on the top show buses transporting students between school sites within the district during the day for instructional purposes. Examples here would include

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routinely taking kids back and forth from a school career center as part of their school day, using a shared band room in another school building, or taking a student to and from an educational cooperative for special services, etc. These routes are needed to help districts use their facilities efficiently. Trustees sometimes opt to move kids among the district's school sites to let them share special equipment, like expensive tools for shop classes, or to share space and facilities, like using a shared gymnasium for physical education classes. That way they can avoid the expense of purchasing duplicate equipment or building facilities to accommodate fluctuating class sizes.

Lastly, HB 135 increases mileage reimbursement rates for all school bus routes. Districts use the transportation aid to maintain buses, employ and train drivers, purchase fuel for buses, and any other costs of the transportation program. The proposed rate increases provide districts between 10 and 18 cents per mile.

There are 2 things HB 135 specifically does NOT do: It doesn't provide funding for transportation related to field trips, athletics or activities, which can't be charged in the district's pupil transportation program. It also doesn't affect mileage reimbursements paid to parents who transport their students in private vehicles. Under this bill, the same parents are eligible for the same amount of reimbursement as they currently receive.

Also, I'd emphasize that HB 135 also does NOT require trustees to transport students who live closer than 3 miles from school. It does provide the districts with assistance if there are compelling reasons to provide buses within 3 miles.

The State Superintendent feels this bill helps address the state's obligation to provide pupil transportation as required by 20-9-309 in the definition of a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools.

I'll be available for questions. Please DO PASS HB 135.